DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 390 SO 034 174

AUTHOR	Early, Mary Frances; Terry, Cynthia
TITLE	Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Lesson with Interdisciplinary Connections for Middle-Level Music Students.
INSTITUTION	Music Educators National Conference, Reston, Va.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	8p.
AVAILABLE FROM	MENC: National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191. Tel: 800-336-3768 (Toll Free). For full text: http://www.menc.org/guides/guideindex.html.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Biographies; Civil Rights; Dance; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Language Arts; Middle Schools; *Music Activities; *Music Education; National Standards; Student Educational Objectives; Visual Arts
IDENTIFIERS	*King (Martin Luther Jr); National Music Education Standards

ABSTRACT

This lesson begins with a very brief biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. The lesson identifies its educational objectives; addresses National Standards for Music Education; lists materials needed; details six step-by-step classroom procedures for lesson implementation; and provides curriculum connections for language arts, visual art, physical education or dance, communication, and musical artists and the civil rights movement. (BT)

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2002

Martin Luther King, Jr.

A Lesson with Interdisciplinary Connections for Middle-Level Music Students

By Mary Frances Early, Clark Atlanta University and Cynthia Terry, Thomasville Elementary School, Atlanta

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is remembered today as an African-American Baptist minister, an outstanding and charismatic leader of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s, an eloquent orator, a noted author, and the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. King promoted the philosophy of non-violence in fighting the battle for racial equality and helped to eradicate the bonds of Jim Crow and segregation in the South. He is best remembered for his powerful speech, *I Have A Dream*, which he delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington on August 28, 1963. Some of his dream was realized during his lifetime with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited racial discrimination in public places and demanded equal opportunity in employment and education. Another major victory came in 1965 when the right to vote without recriminations was made possible by the Voting Rights Act. Dr. King was assassinated in April of 1968 while in Memphis, Tennessee to support a strike by black garbage collectors. Whites, blacks, and people all over the world mourned the death of this outstanding proponent of social justice. In 1983, Congress made King's birthday a federal holiday.

Objectives:

•To explore the role that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. played in the civil rights movement of the 1960s

• To explore the connection between jazz and the African American struggle for freedom.

• To demonstrate how other art forms (dance and visual art) influenced the music of the 1930s.

• To compare the style of jazz with the call and response style of singing (particularly the freedom songs)

• To compare the role that jazz music played in the 1930s and the role of freedom songs in the 1960s

National Standards for Music Education

Content Standard 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

Content Standard 5. Reading and notating music.

Content Standard 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

Content Standard 7. Evaluating music and music performances.

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Content Standard 8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.

Content Standard 9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials:

- Various jazz recordings supplied by the teacher from library or personal collection or the sampler CD "Jazz" including: "Take the 'A' Train," by Duke Ellington and his Orchestra; "God Bless the Child," by Billie Holiday *
- Classical or symphonic music recording of teacher's choice--a piece by Mozart or Beethoven, for example
- Music Texts: Macmillan and Silver Burdett
- Supplementary books: *Songs of Protest and Civil Rights* by Jerry Silverman (Chelsea House, 1992); *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Clayborne Carson (Warner Books, 1998)
- Additional CDs: *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: Black American Freedom Songs, 1960 1966* by Bernice Reagon (Smithsonian, 1997); *Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement Through Its Songs* by Guy Carawan (Smithsonian, 1990)
- Appropriate prints of visual art relating to freedom, jazz, etc.
- Recording of Dr. King's speech *I Have a Dream* (found at www.stanford.edu/group/King/)

*The sampler CD "Jazz" is the CD available to MENC's middle-level music teachers who requested it on the postcard attached to the "Jazz" poster in the October, 2000 issue of Teaching Music.

PROCEDURES:

1. To set the stage for this lesson, have students view the January 15 episode of the PBS series "Jazz," a film by Ken Burns. Encourage students to watch the program on television at home with their family to prepare for this lesson the next day, if possible.

2. Provide students with background information about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In addition to the facts included in the sidebar, more information can be found on the Internet or in the many books about Dr. King (see Resources section at the end of this lesson). Engage students in a discussion of the civil rights movement, the Freedom songs, and Dr. King's leadership role in the era.

3. Play brief excerpts of classical or symphonic music of teacher's choice and one of the jazz selections suggested in the materials section. Have students compare and contrast musical elements such as: tone color; form or structure of the music; performing medium (instruments and voice or strictly instrumental); rhythm; apparent size of ensemble, etc. Ask students to discuss why the jazz piece represents a freer musical expression than that of the classical example

(discussion of improvisation). Lead students in exploring the concept of freedom in jazz music with freedom for people. What limits to freedom did the Jim Crow laws provide?

4. Lead students in singing freedom songs or spirituals that use call and response (found in current music texts or other resources). Point out the call and response phenomenon. Have students listen to Duke Ellington's "Take The 'A' Train" and discover the call and response between groups of instruments.

5. Discuss with students the Depression period of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the era covered in the episode of "Jazz" students were requested to view. Discuss with students the role that jazz played in lifting the spirits of people both African American and white--during that era. How similar was the role of the Freedom songs in the 1960s? Did blacks and whites sing them together or were they sung just by blacks? What was the genesis of many of these songs (traditional spirituals that were adapted to fit the movement)? Which song formed the conclusion of Dr. King's famous speech *I Have A Dream?* What Freedom song was considered the theme song of the civil rights movement?

6. Play the song, "God Bless The Child," found on the "Jazz" sampler CD (or a recording from your music library) and ask students to focus on the lyrics. Discuss how these lyrics depict the feelings of people during the Depression days. Are these lyrics appropriate for all or for just some people in today's economy? Does the popular music of today reflect the social, political, and economic tenor of the time? Ask students to suggest examples of popular music that reflect the time in which they live.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

Language Arts:

Langston Hughes, born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902, was known as the poet laureate of Harlem. He was a major figure during the Harlem Renaissance. Much of his poetry is based on the rhythms of jazz and blues. His first volume of poetry, *The Weary Blues,* was inspired by the music of African Americans. Langston Hughes graduated from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1929, the year of Dr. King's birth. A true social activist, in 1960 Hughes presented a poetry reading at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia at the height of the student protests. Dr. King's *I Have A Dream* speech may have been inspired by some of Langston Hughes' poems about freedom and dreams.

Activity: Have students read some of the poetry of Langston Hughes: Source: Rampersad, Arnold and David Roessel, ed. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes.* New York: Vintage Books, 1994. *Freedom's Plow* p. 263; *Words Like Freedom* p. 269; *Freedom* [1] p. 289; *I Dream A World* p. 311; *Dream Boogie* p. 388.

Visual Art:

African-American artists also made significant contributions to the Harlem Renaissance. Meta Warrick Fuller, sculptor; Aaron Douglas, artist and book illustrator; James Van Der Zee, photographer; Palmer Hayden and William H. Johnson, artists, represent exemplars of this era. Some of their outstanding work is included in the exhibition catalog: The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. *Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America,* Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1987. Jazz musicians and dancers are pictured in Palmer Hayden's painting *Jeunesse* (Plate 11). [Catalog available from www.studiomuseuminharlem.org/]

Other exhibition catalogs that include relevant art works are:

- The Newark Museum, New Jersey. *Against The Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation,* 1989. Augusta Savage's sculpture: *La Citadelle-Freedom* is depicted in Plate 80 p. 252. [See www.newarkmuseum.org]
- San Antonio Museum of Art. *African American Art,* 1994. William Johnson's painting *Jitterbug* p. 18 and Romare Bearden's painting: *Jazz Movement* p. 27 show how jazz as an art form influenced African-American artists. [See http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/johnson/intro3.html]
- Addison Gallery of American Art. *To Conserve a Legacy: American Art from Historically Black Colleges and Universities,* 1999. Romare Bearden's *Jazz* (Chicago) p. 82 and Claude Clark's *Jumpin' Jive* p. 90 depict artwork produced after the Harlem Renaissance that have jazz connections. [See http://sheldon.unl.edu/HTML/ARTIST/Bearden_R/SSII.html]

Activity: Lead students to discuss how this artwork depicts the concept of freedom.

Physical Education or Dance:

After viewing the Lindy Hop shown on the "Jazz" broadcast, have students research the popular dances during Dr. King's teenage years (1940s) and the popular dances during the 1960s. Are any of the steps similar to those of today's popular dances? Ask the physical education teachers if their curriculum addresses dance, and if swing dancing is taught or could be demonstrated.

Communication:

Have students listen to Dr. King's speech, *I Have a Dream,* and discover how his delivery and the audience's response relate to jazz improvisation and the idea of call and response. Note: Dr. King's speech, *I Have a Dream,* can be found at www.stanford.edu/group/King/

Musical Artists and the Civil Rights Movement:

Duke Ellington expressed his support for the Civil Rights movement in 1963 when he wrote the musical, *My People.* The show was commissioned as part of the Century of Negro Progress Exhibition held in Chicago. Ellington included the song, "King Fit The Battle of Alabam'," as a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The show's six-week run

coincided with the March on Washington (August 28, 1963) when Dr. King delivered his memorable speech *I Have a Dream.* Ellington also wrote most of "The Three Black Kings," a composition featuring Balthazar, King Solomon, and Martin Luther King, Jr. It was completed posthumously by Ellington's son, Mercer, choreographed by Alvin Ailey, and performed at the Lincoln Center.

Activities: Have students research the events of the Birmingham, Selma, and Montgomery, Alabama protest marches. Ask students to create lyrics for their own versions of "King Fit The Battle of Alabam'" using the tune of "Joshua Fit The Battle of Jericho."

The composition, "What Color Is Virtue," was performed as the finale to *My People.* Lead a discussion of the lyrics if you have a recording of the CD *My People,* by Duke Ellington. Conclude with students listening to the song.

Another musical giant, Stevie Wonder, lobbied for legislation during the 1980s to declare Dr. King's birthday a national holiday. After much controversy, President Ronald Reagan granted the request and the first Martin Luther King, Jr. day was celebrated on January 15, 1986. A concert to pay tribute to Dr. King was organized to celebrate the victory and Stevie Wonder served as top bill. He wrote the song, "Happy Birthday Dr. King" and invited outstanding musical artists to sing with him. This spectacular occasion with singers of all races and creeds helped to realize Dr. King's dream of a united America.

Activity: Lead the students in singing "Happy Birthday" in recognition of Dr. King's birthday and as a conclusion to this unit.

Other Resources:

Web sites:

- **National Civil Rights Museum** (interactive site that chronicles the civil rights movement and Dr. King's leadership) http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/
- **Education Planet** (interesting site that provides jazz resources for students. JazzKids is among the many sites listed. http://www.educationplanet.com/search/Art_and_Music/Jazz_Music
- **Louisiana State University's Biographical Sketch of Dr. King** (this site provides a concise biographical sketch of Dr. King that includes valuable information) http://www.lib.lsu.edu/hum/mlk/srs218.html
- **World Book's The African American Journey: Martin Luther King, Jr.** (another excellent site that documents Dr. King's role in the civil rights movement) http://www2.worldbook.com/students/feature_index.asp

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